

Gifts for Gardeners

Gardeners are a quirky lot, not easy to buy presents for as each one of them works differently and they may prefer to select their own tool, plant, service. A good tool lasts as long as most marriages and it should be selected with the same care as a spouse.

Praise be for gift certificates! Any size is welcome and local Gloucester and Mathews businesses will be happy to accommodate your shopping list. It is classic advice that simple is best. Avoid any gift that comes with pages of instruction. One that needs batteries not readily available should stay in the store. Like a recipe with 27 ingredients that requires a chef to assemble, a device with 13 moveable parts requires an engineer, not a gardener.

Books are good – another no-battery gift. For a vegetable grower par excellence who surely does not need another book of directions for what she does superbly well, how about a book about cooking that wonderful garden produce. You can find cookbooks of every culinary nationality. Intriguing is “In Season” by Patronite and Raisfeld featuring recipes from New York Magazine inspired by farmer’s market buys.

One book that may appeal to friends with information overload is “Everything you can do in the garden without actually gardening” by Philippa Lewis, an historical and hysterical look at a diversity of activities. For a sumptuous look at Colonial Williamsburg, there is “Flowers and Herbs of Early America” by plant expert and researcher Lawrence D. Griffith and photographer Barbara Temple Lombardi.

Even closer to home is the Gloucester Master Gardener handbook about what grows here, “Home Gardening in Gloucester.” Any book published by Timber Press can be depended upon for accuracy and scholarship. An oldie, 2003, but valuable is “A color atlas of pests of ornamental trees, shrubs, and flowers” The author, David V. Alford, was once head of the entomology department of Britain’s Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and food. As you would expect, it has 1000 pictures in color.

Here it is, a gift that has only two parts, a pot and a lid, and requires no batteries. It is a Dripping Springs Olla. All you have to do to make it operational is to dig a hole, plant the olla, and add water. Best of all, it saves your time and it also saves your plants, your money, and your precious water. If you waste time, as I do, on crossword puzzles, you will recognize that ‘olla’ is the frequent answer to the question ‘clay pot’. These Dripping Springs Ollas are made of an exceptional clay, mixed for optimum strength, porosity and water delivery.

In olla irrigation the water seeps through the ½ inch clay wall at a rate influenced by the plants water use. Another advantage is that by watering only the root zone, you are not wasting water on the surface of the soil where it encourages weeds. The lid on the pot prevents evaporation and keeps bugs and soil out of the water supply.

Whether you have a well or use municipal water, you know how expensive it is to water through our long hot summers. This olla delivery system saves 70% of the water used for cabbage, onion, and tomato plants and lots of savings on all the other things you grow. By nestling your plants around the olla, you can leave home for several days and know your plants will not suffer. The frequency of refilling depends of course on the weather and the growth rate of the plants and is usually every 4 to 7 days, but in Virginia the two-gallon pot may need refilling every five days. If you wish to fertilize by adding it to the water, you use ½ to 1/4 less liquid fertilizer.

Mary Kathryn Dunston is the representative for Dripping Springs Ollas (dunston6@comcast.net) . They are currently available at Ware Neck Produce on Gloucester’s Main Street, at 4 Ur Health in White Marsh Shopping Center and in March they will be available for spring planting at Tatterson Greenhouse in Mathews.

I do have one small problem: I think they are too pretty to plant, such a huggable shape and size should sit on the deck with sunflowers in them.